

STRATEGIES THAT CHALLENGE – EXPLORING THE USE OF DIFFERENTIATED ASSESSMENT IN HIGHLY DIVERSE COHORTS

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ABSTRACT

Australian academics are familiar with the issues arising from teaching large and highly diverse classes—particularly in first year—and the inevitable effect this has on promulgating teaching and assessment practices to ‘middle of the distribution’, thus ignoring the distribution extremes. While the literature documents a range of strategies for supporting students who experience difficulties to meet the required performance standard, very little work has been reported on catering for more capable students who may feel frustrated and poorly challenged in large classes. Alternative assessment tasks were introduced at the authors’ institution into several first year science units of study during 2010, with the aim of providing more challenging learning opportunities for high performing students. The opportunity to choose an alternative and more challenging assessment task was well received by students, even though no additional marks were available nor special credit recognition given for completing the alternative task. This presentation will outline the rationale and the context for the differentiated assessment approach, and it will provide a detailed analysis of the effectiveness of this approach, as seen from students who took the opportunity to complete a more challenging assessment task as well as those who did not.

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